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RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0976
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0757
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY 0001
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0802
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN PRIORITY 0031
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0095

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000442

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP, AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/E
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND CHUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA: SUDAN'S NEW FRONT IN DARFUR CRISIS

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Classified By: DCM David Rundell for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

KEY POINTS:

-- Sudanese Presidential Advisor Dr. Mustafa Othman Ismael traveled to Riyadh to make his government's case regarding the ICC indictment of President al-Bashir. The Sudanese Embassy hosted a large gathering for its citizens which Dr. Ismael attended. He also held a press conference for approximately thirty reporters at the Sudanese Embassy's commercial office.

-- Saudi Arabia's government publicly expressed concern over the ICC warrant after the March 9 Council of Ministers meeting. However, the SAG statement stopped short of outright condemnation. This reportedly upset the GOS. Dr. Ismael met this week with Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, who the next day delivered a stronger public statement against the indictment at a press conference, calling it a "politically motivated decision."

-- According to local sources, Dr. Ismael also used his time in Riyadh to meet with the Saudi Red Crescent Society and other aid organizations. Reportedly, he sought to fill the assistance vacuum left by the expulsion of Darfur aid organizations.

END KEY POINTS

[¶1.](#) (C) DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE: Dr. Mustafa Othman Ismael, advisor to Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, visited Riyadh the week of March 14 to influence public opinion and seek aid contributions for Darfur. The contributions are intended to supplant those lost following this week's expulsion of aid organizations from Sudan. Dr. Ismael also participated in a "town hall" for Sudanese citizens at their Riyadh embassy the night of March 15, and followed that with a March 16 press conference. He also met with Saudi Foreign Minister HRH Prince Saud al-Faisal and reportedly visited several Saudi-based aid organizations.

[¶2.](#) (C) THE OFFICIAL SAUDI LINE: The Saudi Council of Ministers issued a statement on March 9 expressing "concern and displeasure" over the ICC warrant, which he said will not

solve Sudan's problems but increase them. He said the Kingdom will stand by Sudan in confronting "whatever undermines its sovereignty, stability and territorial integrity." Contacts noted that the GOS viewed this initial statement as insufficient. Following his meeting with Dr. Ismael, Prince Saud held a March 15 press conference where, according to press reports, he "toughened the tone" of Saudi Arabia's opposition. "It's a politically motivated decision, otherwise it would not have come at this particular time," declared the Prince.

3, (C) A NUANCED POSITION: According to an Egyptian diplomat, the Saudis will not outright condemn the ICC warrant because they are looking ahead to the Special Tribunal on Lebanon (STL). According to this source, while the Saudis privately condemn the warrant and strongly oppose it, they plan to support the STL and do not want to take contradictory positions. Therefore, the SAG is speaking as strongly as it can about the ICC warrant without condemning it. The Egyptian source added that Bashir's actions against the NGOs served as a preview of other destabilizing acts he would take -- a message to large investors in Sudan.

14. (C) PRESS CONFERENCE: Vice President of the Sudanese Journalist Association in Saudi Arabia, a U.S. Embassy employee, received a journalist's invitation to attend the March 16 press conference at the Sudan Embassy's commercial office in Riyadh. Dr. Ismael addressed approximately 30 reporters, including Sudanese nationals working for Saudi press establishments as well as Saudi, Egyptian and Chinese reporters. Dr. Ismael informed reporters that Prince Saud invited him to discuss the ICC warrant. He reiterated the Sudanese position that the 13 evicted NGOs represented intelligence bodies. He justified eviction by comparing it

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to post-9/11 when the U.S. "closed down many Saudi charitable organizations, regardless of being responsible for any terrorist act." He confirmed that President al-Bashir will attend the Arab League summit in Doha.

WHY SUDAN MATTERS TO THE SAUDIS

15. (C) SAUDI INTERESTS IN SUDAN: Virtual neighbors except for the narrow Red Sea, Saudi Arabia and Sudan share close ties. An estimated one million Sudanese live in the Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia has sharply increased investment in Sudan. Hail Agricultural Development Co. (Hadco) announced in February a \$45.3 million plan to develop over 22 thousand acres in northern Sudan. The SAG-owned Saudi Industrial Development Fund will fund 60 percent of the project. March 3, Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf traveled to Sudan to attend the inauguration of the Marawi dam with President Bashir. The dam project received Saudi funding.

16. (C) MORE ON EGYPT'S VIEW OF SUDAN: The Egyptian diplomat expressed pessimism about Sudan's unity after the 2011 north-south referendum. He said Egypt is preparing for the possibility of a break-up. One problem this presents is yet another country to negotiate with on Nile river issues. He made clear that Egypt's interest is in a stable Sudan since that is the source of Egypt's water. When asked if Bashir's exodus would solve many of the current problems, he said Bashir, though guilty, "is the best there is," opining that Bashir has agreed to most of the West's terms in Darfur. He added that the Egyptians unsuccessfully have asked the French to expel Sudan Liberation Movement leader Abdul Wahib al-Nur, who in his view enjoys a life of luxury in Paris.

THE DOHA PEACE PROCESS

17. (C) A GOOD START?: One week prior to the ICC announcement,

a Sudanese diplomat based in Riyadh expressed fear that the warrant would destabilize Sudan and dampen peace prospects. He viewed the Doha negotiations as a good beginning but cited the complexity of bringing so many actors to the table. He worried that the media in Qatar will shine too bright a light on negotiations, which necessitate private dialogue free of public debate about every proposal. He viewed the Qataris as sufficiently neutral hosts for the negotiations.

18. (C) SAUDIS STANDING ASIDE: The Sudanese diplomat also shared information about discussions between his government and the Saudis on the Doha peace process. Reportedly, the Saudis offered to participate as a mediator with the Doha process. The Sudanese feared that such "help" combined with Saudi's desire to be a regional leader, could undermine Qatar's effort. The Sudanese asked the Saudis to "help positively or not at all." The Saudis have quietly allowed Qatar to take the lead.
FRAKER